Television Has Tagged Him 'Mr. Average American'

by TONI GINNETTI

Richard Johnson, Rolling Meadows' nationally known "average American," might consider dubbing himself with another title, that of a bonafide television celebrity.

The tag seems fitting in view of the fact that Johnson is now a veteran of three TV telecasts produced by the National Public Affairs Center for Television (NPACT) based in Washington, D. C. Each show was designed to focus on the plight of the typical middle-income American as seen through a study of a scientifically-chosen prototype, Johnson.

In the first, televised in February, he was the average guy caught in the middle of the economic squeeze, earning enough to live comfortably but not having much left after the bills get paid.

The second show, seen last month, followed Johnson on abehind-the-scenes look at a presidential campaign with Democratic hopeful Sen. George McGovern. The latest telecast, aired Monday night on WTTW-TV (Channel 11) was actually a repeat of the second show.

"THE COMMENTS from NPACT on the show have been very good," Johnson said yesterday. "I was kind of surprised at the comments I made at the end, but I thought the photography and the editing was excellent."

As a barnstormer on the campaign trail, Johnson traveled almost 8,500 miles and visited ten cities in one week. The pace was hectic, and Johnson admits he marvels at how any man could stand the kind of campaigning a presidential race requires.

"I can't imagine how anyone can endure that kind of campaigning for three or four months. It's really an effort for a human being. I know I was completely exhausted after just five days."

Johnson says he hasn't been asked to "star" in any more shows, but that doesn't necessarily mean the end of his celebrity career. "I've written my memoirs of the trip and sent them to NPACT in Washington and I'm hoping they'll publish them.

"AS FAR AS any future activities, I don't know of any. But I suppose I'll be getting calls just before the election asking me what I think of the candidates and who I'll vote for."

At the time he took the trip, Johnson said he hadn't made up his mind as to whom his choice for the presidency would be. Asked if he had made up his mind yet, he said, "I'm still undecided, but I'm still leaning toward the President.

"I see a little bit of good in both men, but I guess I won't be able to say for sure who I'll vote for until after I've pulled the lever on Nov. 7," he added with a laugh.

Johnson says he has received no reaction from the McGovern staff on the telecast of the trip but adds with a touch of annoyance in his otherwise cheerful voice, "I keep getting literature from the California headquarters of John Schmitz," American Independent Party candidate for president, trying to discourage him from voting for either Nixon or McGovern.

OTHER THAN that, he says his privacy has only been interrupted by occasional unsigned letters criticizing him for saying he would have rather seen Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) win the Democratic presidential nomination.

"There hasn't been any real infringement on my private life," Johnson says. The only thing he didn't like of the whole experience was the title of one of the shows, he adds.

"I think they called one of the segments 'I Am the People.' Good grief, I don't profess to speak for all the people. I'm only one man."

The Rolling Meadows

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Rain

TODAY: Cloudy and cold, chance of rain mixed with snow; high in upper 30s.

THURSDAY: Clearing and a little warmer; high in 40s.

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